Write a Sonnet

Photo by Lloyd Wolf

In keeping with a long-standing Shakespeare's Birthday tradition at the Folger, we'd love to read or hear your own 14-line sonnet. Upload to social media, tagging @FolgerLibrary and using the

hashtag **#ShareYourShakespeare** so that everyone can enjoy what you wrote. If you film yourself reading it, we encourage you to share it in writing, too.

Step 1: Choose your own sonnet adventure.

The world is your oyster! You can write a sonnet...

...on your own.

Get typing, or dust off that quill pen.

...with others in your home.

Banish boredom around the dinner table or on the couch!

...with friends and family online.

Collaborate to write and record yourselves across the miles.

Step 2: Need inspiration?

- Check out Shakespeare's sonnets.
- Read a poem that pokes fun at sonnets.
- Read a poem that refers to the film *The Matrix*.
- Read a poem that plays with pop culture and with Shakespeare, too.
- Listen to poet Terrance Hayes read one of his sonnets.

Step 3: Get writing.

Sonnets have been around for over seven centuries, maybe because they're so much fun to write! A sonnet is a poem of 14 lines that reflects upon a single issue or idea. It usually takes a turn, called a "volta," about 8 lines in, and then resolves the issue by the end.

Shakespearean sonnets use iambic pentameter and an ABAB CDCD EFEF GG rhyme scheme, but don't worry too much about all that. Sonneteers have been bending and breaking the sonnet form for ages, so share whatever you've got!

Here's a quick list to help you get started. How fancy you get is up to you!

THE BASICS

- 14 lines (though there are “stretched sonnets” of 15 and 16 lines, too)
- A big idea or feeling or issue (like love, or heartbreak, or a problem to be solved)

THE NEXT LEVEL

- A turn, or “volta”—some kind of shift in tone or thought
- ABAB CDCD EFEF GG rhyme scheme
- 10 syllables in each line

SUPER-FANCY SONNETEERING

- Iambic pentameter in some or all of the 14 lines
- Final couplet resolves the issue or problem in the sonnet

Try your hand, see how much of this sonnet stuff you want to play with, and no matter what, enjoy the experience of writing poetry.

More about sonnets:

- Read the winning sonnets and runners-up from our 2019 Shakespeare's Birthday Open House sonnet contest. If you would like to see more, enjoy the winning sonnets and runners-up from several previous Folger competitions.
- Read Shakespeare's sonnets—and explore a wealth of other resources about sonnets.
- Listen to two interviews with Dr. Jane Kingsley-Smith from our *Shakespeare Unlimited* podcast: The Early Years of Shakespeare Sonnets, on the sonnets and the myths around them, and The Long Life of Shakespeare's Sonnets, on the sonnets' reception and their queer history.
- Find out more about Pop Sonnets, which put songs by writers from Chuck Berry to Taylor Swift into sonnet form, in a *Shakespeare Unlimited* interview with their author Erik Didriksen.

Note: Although we're eager to see everyone's sonnets as part of #ShareYourShakespeare, we will not be holding a Shakespeare's Birthday sonnet contest this year.

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